

# School Arson Fires

## *A guide for School Administrators*

Nationally, arson causes \$4 million plus dollars damage each year to educational structures and is the leading cause of fires in educational buildings. Arson should not be considered a small crime. In Washington State arson combined with suspected arson is the leading cause of fire deaths. Arson robs communities of valuable assets in lives and property.

### 1. Prevention

- ☐ **Do not allow matches, lighters or smoking materials on school property**
- ☐ **Cleaning and Maintenance**  
Trim or remove shrubbery and be sure there are no combustible items stored near the outside of buildings.
- ☐ **Illuminate Building Exteriors**  
Motion activated lighting is effective and inexpensive. Trim or remove shrubbery and signs that obstruct the view of the building from the street.
- ☐ **Consider fencing the property.** Woven wire fences with locked gates limit access without providing privacy for the arsonists.

### 2. Protection

- ☐ **Know your school's fire protection system.**  
Be familiar with the type of fire protection system at your school. Know the location of pull stations and whether you school is protection by fire sprinklers.
- ☐ **School Fire Drills**  
Actively participate in school fire drills.
- ☐ **Know you school district's policy.**  
Most school districts have policies regarding building security and incidents in school buildings. Be familiar with emergency contact numbers. Keep a current list of all building key holders.
- ☐ **Document**  
Document any suspicious activities, noting the date, time and description of vehicles or persons. Patrols can be effective also.

### 3. Intervention

- ☐ **Fire Department**  
Arson is a seriously underreported crime. Every arson fire should be reported to the fire department. A fire investigation should be conducted by the fire department on every arson fire. Early identification of young firesetters can lead to successful community based intervention strategies. Contact the Arson alarm Foundation at 1-800-55ARSON to report arson information.
- ☐ **Law Enforcement**  
A criminal investigation should be conducted by law enforcement. Firesetting is arson if there is a purposeful plan to destroy property by setting a fire. Motive and intent must be established. When determined to be a criminal act of arson, firesetting carries with it serious consequences which may include arrest, trial, conviction, restitution and possibly incarceration. Local Crime Stoppers programs have been effective in gaining arson information.
- ☐ **Adapted-CISD**  
As a post-violence intervention, an Adapted-Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) model is recommended for student populations that have been victims of school violence or a witness to it. An Adapted-CISD model uses both a separate debriefing for parents and later, a joint student-parent debriefing. The school counselor should be consulted to facilitate the debriefing.

**“Arson is a violent crime that hurts everyone”**